

**NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2015:  
“Healthy eating in the Workplace”**

September 2015

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

1. When did nutrition week originate?

National Nutrition Week (NNW) started in the 1990s when the Department of Health was approached by the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA). It was agreed that it was important for nutrition messages to be included in the Department of Health Calendar. World Food Day is recognized on the 16<sup>th</sup> October, and Nutrition Week in the week preceding this, namely from 9 to 15 October.

2. What is the objective of NNW 2015?

The objective of NNW 2015 is to create awareness and giving information to service providers about the provisioning of healthy meals in the workplace and to employees about making healthy choices. The theme for NNW 2015 is 'Healthy eating in the workplace'.

3. Why is healthy eating in the workplace so important?

- According to the 2012 South African Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES), obesity levels are increasing and with it there is an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The prevalence of overweight and obesity combined is at 65% for females and 31% for males in South Africa.
- People who are overweight or obese have a higher risk for several occupational conditions as well as workplace injury.
- Employees with an unhealthy diet have been found to have a 66% increased risk of lower productivity than those who ate a healthy diet.
- Many workers consume at least half of their meals and snacks during work hours. The workplace therefore is an important setting to promote healthy eating by creating an environment where healthy food choices are readily accessible through canteens, function catering or vending machines.

4. What are the factors that contribute to unhealthy eating in the workplace?

Many factors influence the food people eat at work such as storage, preparation and eating facilities, food provisioning in the workplace, during meetings, from canteens or vending machines or via food provided by food outlets outside the workplace. Busy work schedules or shift times also have an impact. Where healthy food options are readily available and accessible they are more frequently selected. On the other hand, if unhealthy food choices are not so visible and easily available, people are less likely to go out of their way to purchase them.

5. What is the goal with providing healthy food in the workplace?

Promoting healthy eating in the workplace, especially increased consumption of vegetables and fruit, can contribute to:

- Better physical and mental health
- Reduced risk for non-communicable disease
- Improved immunity
- Maintenance of body weight
- Improved productivity

6. What should be the criteria when meals or refreshments between meals are provided at meetings?

Provision of meals or refreshments between meals should be based on the duration of the event.

When ordering meals or refreshments, request the energy content per serving from the service provider. Alternatively, contact a registered dietitian who will be able to advise you on the energy content of meals and beverages.

7. What should meals that are provided for lunch in the workplace look like?

The meals should follow the guidelines for healthy eating (also called the food-based dietary guidelines). For instance, a meal should consist of one meat dish option with an option of vegetarian for those who are vegetarian, one starch option, two vegetables options, one fruit option and water. The meals should be appealing, affordable, prepared using healthier cooking methods and where possible, provide nutrition information to promote healthier choices.

8. What about refreshments that can be served between meals e.g. for half day meetings?

The following can be served:

*Sandwiches / bread rolls /pita bread / wraps:*

- 1 Sandwich (2 slices of wholewheat, brown, rye or seeded bread) / 1 wholewheat or brown bread roll/ 1 wholewheat medium size wrap/ 1 wholewheat medium size pita per person;
- Fillings for bread rolls/sandwiches can include tuna, egg, chicken or, cheese and, tomato, lettuce and cucumber;
- Fillings for pita breads or wraps can include feta and avocado, chicken strips, peppers and cucumber salsa, roast vegetables, hummus and roast vegetables, basil pesto and salads, grilled fish and cucumber salsa.

*Meat platters:* Grilled chicken/mini skewers/mini meatballs served with a tzatziki dip; biltong, boiled eggs, cheese, smooth cottage cheese.

*Vegetable platter:* Vegetable sticks (celery, carrot, cucumber, peppers and cocktail/cherry tomatoes) served with a tzatziki dip or hummus dip.

*Fresh fruit platter or dried fruit platter.*

Ideally, the platter should consist of a mixture of vegetables, fruits, sandwiches, and meats in one platter rather than as meat-only or bread-only platters. It is also important to include vegetarian options in the platters.

9. How big should the portion size of food be that is dished up?

- A fistful is equal to one cup and can be used to estimate the portion size for starchy foods such as rice, samp, cooked pap, pasta or for whole fruit;
- The size of the palm of the hand can be used to estimate the portion size for meat, fish or chicken. If a stew or curry is served this would be about ½ cup.
- Two open handfuls can be used to estimate the portion size for vegetables (one open handful is about ½ cup);
- One open handful can be used to estimate the portion size for cooked beans/split peas/lentils or nuts or raisins;
- The tip of the thumb is equivalent to one teaspoon and can be used to estimate the portion size for all oils, margarine or mayonnaise;
- The size of the thumb can also be used to estimate the portion size for peanut butter or hard cheese.

10. What tips do you have for vending machine operators or employees who buy food from vending machines or from kiosks?

Provide an assortment of healthier food choices including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free/low-fat dairy products, and products with lower amounts of saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium.

Some examples of snack foods that can be provided in the vending machine include:

- Individually wrapped muffins-bran, plain scones or savoury scones small to medium , i.e. 40 - 60g);
- Unflavoured and low-salt popcorn;
- Unsalted or low-salt pretzels;
- Low salt wholewheat crackers;
- Unsalted nut trail mix;
- Low salt or unsalted nuts;
- Baked corn crisps;
- Muesli or cereal bars;
- Sugar-free gums;
- Fruit in tubs;
- Dried fruit, fruit rolls, fruit bars (no added sugar);
- Unflavoured, low-fat / fat-free yoghurt;
- Biltong (ostrich or game);
- Sugar-free chewing gum;

10. What about beverages that are made available in the workplace (e.g. through canteens, work functions or vending machines)?

It is suggested that any of the following beverages are provided or chosen:

- Water, still or sparkling/soda water;
- Tea or coffee -regular or decaffeinated (sugar and sugar substitutes may be provided and milk such as low-fat, 2%, 1% fat or fat-free milk only);
- Low-fat UHT milk (200 ml tetrapacks);
- 100% fruit juice with no added sugar (maximum serving size of 250ml);
- 100% vegetable juice with no added sugar and  $\leq 200$ mg of sodium (maximum of 250ml per serving);
- Low-energy beverages i.e light/ zero/ diet (maximum of 200ml per serving).

11. The importance of healthy eating is being emphasised, but what about being active in the workplace?

During their working day, employees should try to be as physically active as possible and to limit being sedentary such as sitting at the computer for long periods of time without a break. Even if there is not a gym in the workplace, some examples of what staff can do to be active at the workplace include:

- Use the stairs rather than lifts
- Stand up to stretch regularly and when taking phone calls
- Stand during meetings where possible
- Walk to meetings in nearby buildings rather than taking transport where possible
- Walk to colleagues instead of calling or emailing them where possible
- Have five minute activity breaks every hour during meetings
- Avoid scheduling meetings over the lunch period to enable staff to be active
- Participate in sports teams, lunchtime walking and jogging groups and events

12. Where can one get more information about healthy eating in the workplace?

- [www.nutritionweek.co.za](http://www.nutritionweek.co.za);
- The Department of Health: [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za); Telephone numbers:
  - National: 012 - 395 8770
  - Western Cape: 021 - 583 5663/2275
  - Eastern Cape: 040 - 608 1705
  - Northern Cape: 053 - 830 0551
  - KwaZulu-Natal: 033 - 395 2326
  - Free State 051 - 408 1281/1896
  - Gauteng 011 - 355 3551
  - North West 018 - 397 2364
  - Mpumalanga 013 - 766 3413
  - Limpopo 015 - 293 6198
- The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA): [www.adsa.org.za](http://www.adsa.org.za);  
Telephone: 011 - 061 5000;  
Blog website: <https://nutritionconfidence.wordpress.com/facebook>;  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ADSAorgza>;  
Twitter: ADSA\_RD
- The Heart and Stroke Foundation: [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za);  
Heart and Stroke Health Line: 0860 1 HEART (43278);

- Consumer Education Project Milk South Africa: [www.rediscoverdairy.co.za](http://www.rediscoverdairy.co.za);  
Telephone: 012 - 991 4164.

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